

## **Advisory Boards and Standing Committee Members**

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One of the challenges in a cooperative is involving and informing members. Members need an understanding of the cooperative to participate in governance. There is also a continuum of involvement that occurs before a member considers running for the board of directors. Some cooperative have developed the structure of an Associate Board of Directors. Associate board members are appointed by the CEO and board and participate in every board meeting but do not have voting privileges. Some members who might not be ready to run for the board of directors might take on the responsibilities of an associate board position. Serving on the associate board is obviously a great way to build an understanding of the cooperative and the strategic issues that it faces.

Another potential structure to increase member involvement is the formation of one or more advisory boards. As opposed to the associate board, the advisory board meets only periodically and often serves as a sounding board for new strategies and investments. The formation of an advisory board can be a great vehicle to communicate with key member groups. The benefit of an advisory board is that it allows for wide range of input at little risk to the cooperative and relatively low time commitment from the members. The downside is that the advisory board agendas are generally limited to very specific topics. Advisory board service is a great transition into becoming involved in the cooperative. However, advisory board members do not gain a full understanding of the issues facing the cooperative.

Another structure for member involvement is service on a standing committee. For example, the board could ask a member to serve on the audit committee or infrastructure planning committee. Committee involvement is typically similar to advisory board service in that it involves a manageable time commitment and a short and defined duration. Committees in a cooperative typically have a specified charge where an advisory board is often used to gain input and feedback.

Associate boards, advisory boards and committee service are not mutually exclusive. Your cooperative can use one or all of those structures to involve and inform members and help build future board candidates. The journey to building the next generation of cooperative leaders begins with the first step!

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